

WATCHMEN
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WATCHMEN



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WATCHMEN 1

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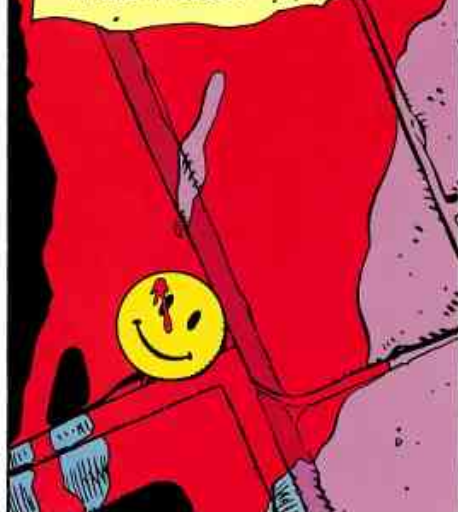
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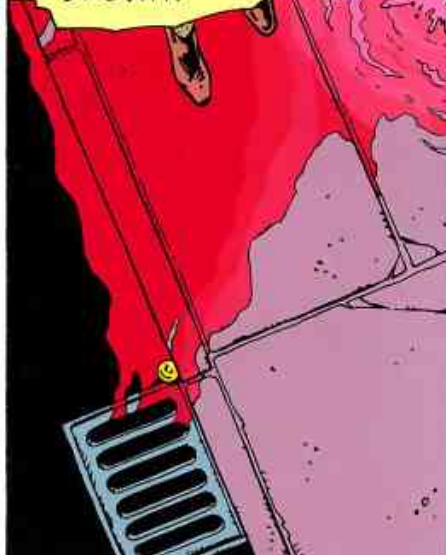


RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL.
OCTOBER 12TH, 1985.:

DOG CARCASS IN ALLEY
THIS MORNING, TIRE TREAD
ON BURST STOMACH. THIS
CITY IS AFRAID OF ME.
I HAVE SEEN ITS
TRUE FACE.



THE STREETS ARE EXTENDED
GUTTERS AND THE GUTTERS
ARE FULL OF BLOOD AND
WHEN THE DRAINS FINALLY
SCAB OVER, ALL THE
VERMIN WILL
DROWN.



THE ACCUMULATED FILTH
OF ALL THEIR SEX AND
MURDER WILL FOAM UP ABOUT
THEIR WAISTS AND ALL THE
WHORES AND POLITICIANS
WILL LOOK UP AND
SHOUT "SAVE US!"...



...AND I'LL
LOOK DOWN
AND WHISPER
"NO."

THEY HAD A CHOICE,
ALL OF THEM. THEY COULD
HAVE FOLLOWED IN THE
FOOTSTEPS OF GOOD MEN
LIKE MY FATHER,
OR PRESIDENT
TRUMAN.

DECENT MEN
WHO BELIEVED
IN A DAY'S
WORK FOR A
DAY'S PAY.



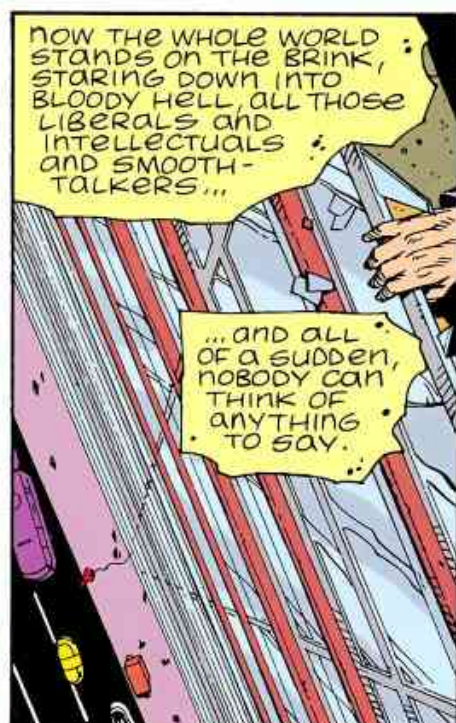
INSTEAD THEY FOLLOWED
THE DROPPINGS OF LECHERS
AND COMMUNISTS AND
DIDN'T REALIZE THAT
THE TRAIL LED OVER
A PRECIPICE UNTIL
IT WAS TOO
LATE.

DON'T TELL
ME THEY
DIDN'T HAVE
A CHOICE.



NOW THE WHOLE WORLD
STANDS ON THE BRINK,
STARING DOWN INTO
BLOODY HELL, ALL THOSE
LIBERALS AND
INTELLECTUALS
AND SMOOTH-
TALKERS...

...AND ALL
OF A SUDDEN,
NOBODY CAN
THINK OF
ANYTHING
TO SAY.



HMM.

THAT'S
QUITE A
DROP.



G-2115

1



YEAH. POOR GUY. Y'KNOW, I ALWAYS WONDER ... DO YOU THINK YOU BLACK OUT BEFORE YOU HIT THE SIDEWALK, OR WHAT?

FRANKLY, I DON'T NEED TO KNOW THAT BAD.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED HERE?



WELL, LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE BROKE IN BY BUSTIN' THIS DOOR DOWN.

THAT WOULD TAKE EITHER TWO GUYS OR ONE GUY ON SERIOUS DRUGS, BECAUSE THE DOOR HAD A CHAIN FASTENED ON THE INSIDE.



"...WHICH MEANS THAT THE OCCUPANT WAS HOME WHEN IT HAPPENED."



HMM. I SAW THE BODY, AN' HE LOOKED BEEFY ENOUGH TO PROTECT HIMSELF. FOR A GUY HIS AGE, HE WAS IN TERRIFIC SHAPE.

WHAT, YOU MEAN APART FROM BEING DEAD?



"NO...I MEAN THIS GUY, THIS BLAKE GUY, THE OCCUPANT ... HE HAD MUSCLES LIKE A WEIGHTLIFTER.

"HE WOULD HAVE PUT UP SOME KINDA FIGHT, I'M CERTAIN."



YEAH, WELL, LOOKS LIKE HE LOST. MAYBE IT WAS A COUPLE OF GUYS AND THEY JUST OVERPOWERED HIM.

MAYBE. THE DATA WE HAVE SUGGESTS HE'S BEEN DOING SOME SORT OF OVERSEAS DIPLOMATIC WORK FOR YEARS...



"LOTTA CLASSY EXPENSE-ACCOUNT LIVING. MAYBE HE JUST GOT SOFT."



HE DON'T LOOK TOO SOFT IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH. WONDER HOW HE GOT THAT SCAR? IT LOOKS...

HEY! THE GUY HE'S SHAKIN' HANDS WITH IN THE PICTURE... IT'S VICE-PRESIDENT FORD!



"HEY, SO IT IS! WELL, LISTEN, BETWEEN YOU AND ME, I THINK WE CAN RULE HIM OUT AS A SUSPECT."

"A JOB LIKE THIS JUST ISN'T HIS STYLE."



THAT'D BE REAL FUNNY IF WE HAD ANY BETTER LEADS TO GO ON.

I MEAN, WHAT IS THIS? A LITTLE MONEY GOT STOLEN, BUT NO WAY IS THIS A STRAIGHT BURGLARY...



"SOMEBODY REALLY HAD IT IN FOR THIS GUY."



I MEAN, HOW DID HE GO OUTTA THE WINDOW?

MAYBE HE TRIPPED AGAINST IT.

FORGET IT. THAT'S STRONG GLASS, MAN. YOU TRIP AGAINST IT, EVEN A BIG GUY LIKE THAT, IT DON'T BREAK.



"I THINK YOU'D HAVE TO BE THROWN."



WELL, IF THIS EDWARD BLAKE WAS AS BIG AS YOU SAY HE WAS, THEN ONE GUY WOULD NEVER LIFT HIM, SO WE'RE TALKING TWO ASSAILANTS HERE.

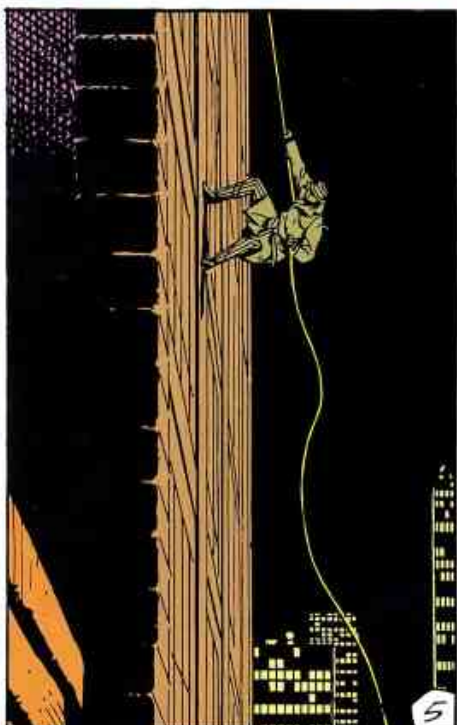
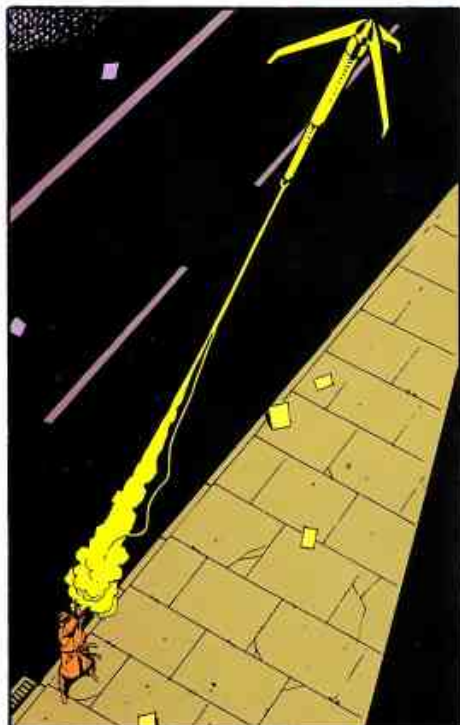
WHICH FLOOR YA WANT?

OH, UH, GROUND FLOOR, PLEASE.



"GROUND FLOOR COMIN' UP."

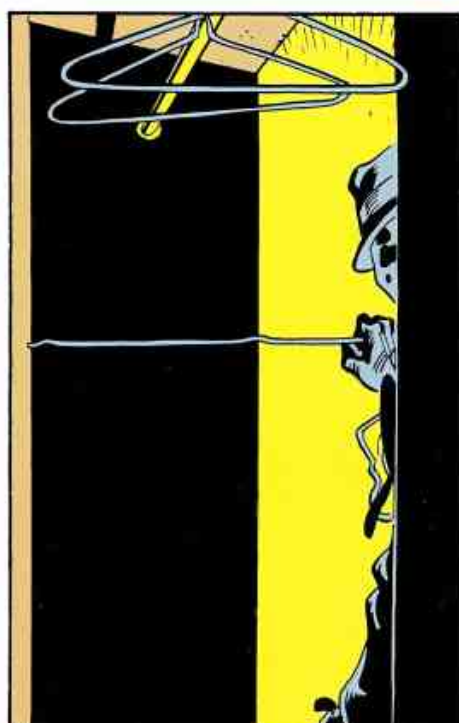
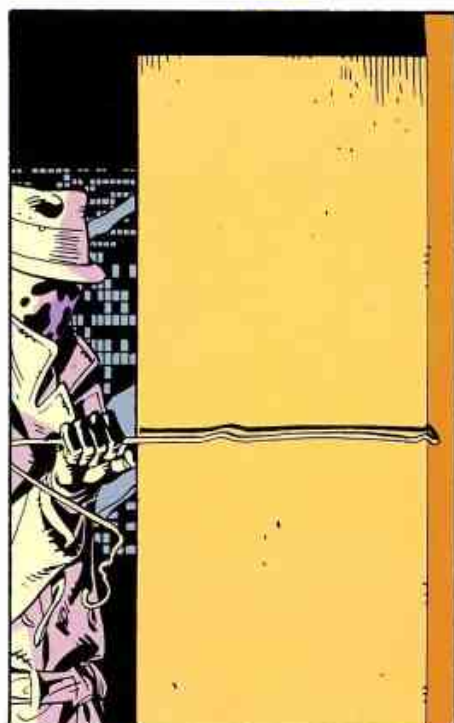


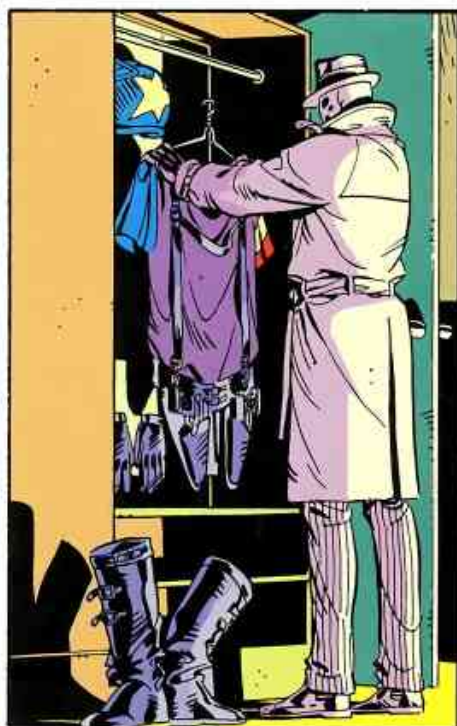




AT MIDNIGHT, ALL THE AGENTS...









SO, THERE I WAS IN THE SUPERMARKET BUYIN' DOGFOOD FOR OL' PHANTOM HERE, I TURN THE CORNER OF THE AISLE AND WHAM! I BUMP INTO THE SCREAMING SKULL!

YOU REMEMBER HIM?



I THINK I HEARD YOU MENTION HIM...

OH, I PUT HIM AWAY A DOZEN TIMES IN THE FORTIES, BUT HE REFORMED AN' TURNED TO JESUS SINCE THEN. MARRIED, GOT TWO KIDS...

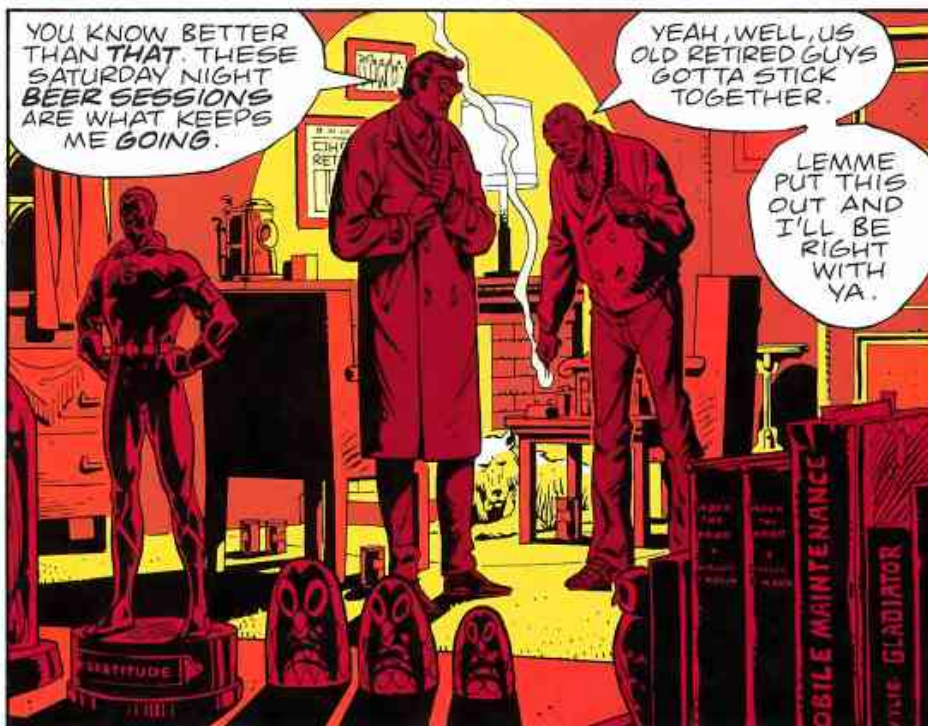
WE TRADED ADDRESSES. NICE GUY.



UH, HOLLIS, LISTEN... IT'S ALMOST MIDNIGHT. I OUGHTTA GO.

OH SURE. LOST TRACK O' THE TIME THERE, TALKIN' 'BOUT ALL THAT OLD STUFF.

YOU MUSTA BEEN BORED AS HELL.



YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT. THESE SATURDAY NIGHT BEER SESSIONS ARE WHAT KEEPS ME GOING.

YEAH, WELL, US OLD RETIRED GUYS GOTTA STICK TOGETHER.

LEMME PUT THIS OUT AND I'LL BE RIGHT WITH YA.



Y'KNOW, IT WAS A CRYIN' SHAME THEY PUT YOU YOUNGSTERS OUT TO GRASS IN '77. YOU WERE A BETTER NITE OWL THAN I EVER WAS.

HOLLIS, WE BOTH KNOW THAT'S BULLSHIT, BUT THANKS ANYWAY.



HEY, WATCH WITH THE LANGUAGE! THIS IS THE LEFT HOOK THAT FLOORED CAPTAIN AXIS, REMEMBER?

HOW COULD I FORGET THANKS FOR ANOTHER GREAT NIGHT, HOLLIS. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.



YOU TOO, DANNY.

GOD BLESS.



USED

WE FIX 'EM!

OBsolete MODELS A SPECIALTY







RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL. OCTOBER 13TH, 1985.

SLEPT ALL DAY. AWOKEN AT 4:37. LANDLADY COMPLAINING ABOUT SMELL. SHE HAS FIVE CHILDREN BY FIVE DIFFERENT FATHERS. I AM SURE SHE CHEATS ON WELFARE.

SOON IT WILL BE DARK.

A man in a trench coat and hat, wearing a mask with an 'X' for eyes, counts money in a city at night. The background is a dark, stylized cityscape with a red sky.

BENEATH ME, THIS AWFUL CITY, IT SCREAMS LIKE AN ABATTOIR FULL OF RETARDED CHILDREN. NEW YORK.

ON FRIDAY NIGHT, A COMEDIAN DIED IN NEW YORK.

SOMEBODY KNOWS WHY.

DOWN THERE...

SOMEBODY KNOWS.

THE DUSK REEKS OF
FORNICATION AND
BAD CONSCIENCES.

HAPPY HARRY'S W.D.

BAR GRILL

V.I.E.T B.R.O.N.X.

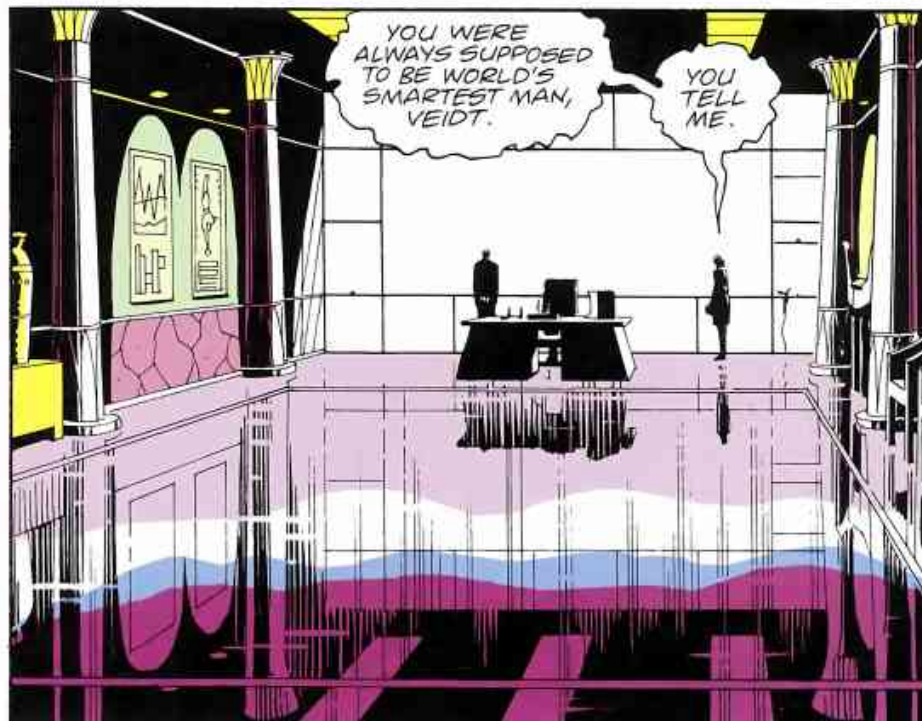






THE COMEDIAN DEAD?

BUT WHY?



YOU WERE ALWAYS SUPPOSED TO BE WORLD'S SMARTEST MAN, VEIDT.

YOU TELL ME.



I NEVER CLAIMED TO BE ANYBODY SPECIAL, RORSCHACH. I JUST HAVE SOME OVER-ENTHUSIASTIC P.R. MEN.

LISTEN... COULD IT HAVE BEEN A POLITICAL KILLING? MAYBE THE SOVIETS...



DREIBERG SAID SAME THING. DON'T BELIEVE IT.

AMERICA HAS DR. MANHATTAN. REDS HAVE BEEN RUNNING SCARED SINCE '65. THEY'D NEVER DARE ANTAGONIZE US.

I THINK WE'VE GOT A MASK-KILLER.



NOT NECESSARILY.

THE COMEDIAN HAD PLENTY OF OTHER POLITICAL ENEMIES TO CHOOSE FROM, EVEN DIS-COUNTING THE RUSSIANS...

THE MAN WAS PRACTICALLY A NAZI.



HE STOOD UP FOR HIS COUNTRY, VEIDT. HE NEVER LET ANYBODY RETIRE HIM.

NEVER CASHED IN ON HIS REPUTATION.



NEVER SET UP A COMPANY SELLING POSTERS AND DIET BOOKS AND TOY SOLDIERS BASED ON HIMSELF.

NEVER BECAME A PROSTITUTE.

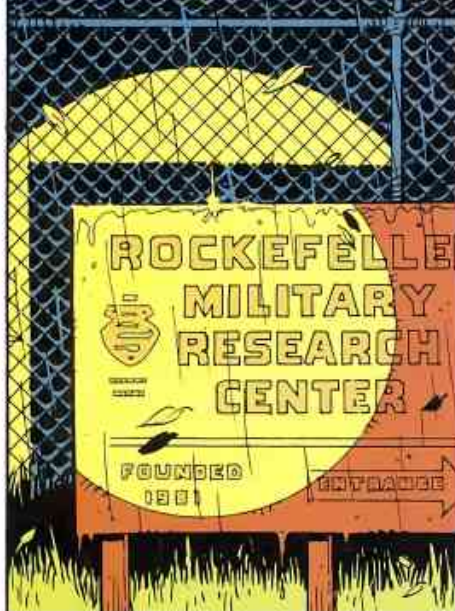
IF THAT MAKES HIM A NAZI, YOU MIGHT AS WELL CALL ME A NAZI, TOO.



HM.



RORSCHACH'S JOURNAL.
OCTOBER 13TH, 1985. 8.30 PM.:



MEETING WITH VEIDT LEFT
BAD TASTE IN MOUTH. HE IS
PAMPERED AND DECADENT,
BETRAYING EVEN HIS OWN
SHALLOW, LIBERAL
AFFECTATIONS.



POSSIBLY
HOMOSEXUAL?
MUST
REMEMBER
TO INVESTIGATE
FURTHER.

DREIBERG AS BAD
A FLABBY FAILURE
WHO SITS WHIMPERING
IN HIS BASEMENT.



WHY ARE SO
FEW OF US
LEFT ACTIVE,
HEALTHY, AND
WITHOUT
PERSONALITY
DISORDERS?

THE FIRST
NITE OWL RUNS
AN AUTO-
REPAIR
SHOP.



THE FIRST
SILK SPECTRE
IS A BLOATED,
AGING WHORE,
DYING IN A
CALIFORNIAN
REST RESORT.

CAPTAIN
METROPOLIS WAS
DECAPITATED
IN A CAR CRASH
BACK IN '74.

MOTHMAN'S
IN AN
ASYLUM
UP IN
MAINE.



THE SILHOUETTE
RETIRED IN
DISGRACE,
MURDERED SIX
WEEKS LATER
BY A MINOR
ADVERSARY
SEEKING
REVENGE.

DOLLAR BILL
GOT SHOT.
HOODED
JUSTICE
WENT
MISSING
IN '55.

THE COMEDIAN
IS DEAD.



ONLY TWO NAMES
REMAINING ON
MY LIST.



BOTH SHARE
PRIVATE
QUARTERS AT
ROCKEFELLER
MILITARY
RESEARCH
CENTER.

I SHALL
GO TO
THEM.

I SHALL GO AND TELL
THE INDESTRUCTIBLE
MAN THAT SOMEONE
PLANS TO MURDER
HIM.



GOOD
EVENING,
RORSCHACH.













ON FRIDAY NIGHT,
A COMEDIAN DIED
IN NEW YORK.



SOMEONE THREW HIM
OUT OF A WINDOW AND
WHEN HE HIT THE
SIDEWALK HIS HEAD
WAS DRIVEN UP
INTO HIS
STOMACH.



NOBODY
CARES.

NOBODY
CARES BUT
ME.



ARE THEY
RIGHT? IS IT
FUTILE?

SOON THERE
WILL BE WAR.
MILLIONS WILL
BURN. MILLIONS
WILL PERISH IN
SICKNESS AND
MISERY.

WHY DOES
ONE DEATH
MATTER
AGAINST
SO MANY?



BECAUSE THERE IS GOOD
AND THERE IS EVIL, AND
EVIL MUST BE PUNISHED.
EVEN IN THE FACE OF
ARMAGEDDON I SHALL
NOT COMPROMISE
IN THIS.

BUT THERE
ARE SO MANY
DESERVING OF
RETRIBUTION...



...AND THERE IS
SO LITTLE TIME.







HEY, YOU REMEMBER THAT GUY? THE ONE WHO PRETENDED TO BE A SUPER-VILLAIN SO HE COULD GET BEATEN UP?

OH, YOU MEAN CAPTAIN CARNAGE. HA HA HA! HE WAS ONE FOR THE BOOKS.



YOU'RE TELLING ME! I REMEMBER, I CAUGHT HIM COMING OUT OF THIS JEWELERS. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HIS RACKET WAS.

I START HITTING HIM AND I THINK "JEEZ! HE'S BREATHIN' FUNNY! DOES HE HAVE ASTHMA?"

HA HA HA.



HE TRIED THAT WITH ME, ONLY I'D HEARD ABOUT HIM, SO I JUST WALKED AWAY.

HE FOLLOWS ME DOWN THE STREET ... BROAD DAYLIGHT, RIGHT? HE'S SAYING "PUNISH ME!" I'M SAYING "NO! GET LOST!"

HA HA HA.



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO HIM?

UH, WELL, HE PULLED IT ON RORSCHACH AND RORSCHACH DROPPED HIM DOWN AN ELEVATOR SHAFT.



PHAAA HA HA HA!

OH, GOD, I'M SORRY, THAT ISN'T FUNNY. HA HA HA HA HA!

HA HA HA! NO, I GUESS IT'S NOT...



AHUh.

AHUUUUUUH...

JEEZ, Y'KNOW, THAT FELT GOOD. THERE DON'T SEEM TO BE SO MANY LAUGHS AROUND THESE DAYS.

WELL, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?



THE COMEDIAN IS DEAD.

At midnight, all the agents and superhuman crew, go out and round up everyone who knows more than they do.

—Bob Dylan



UNDER THE HOOD

We present here excerpts from Hollis Mason's autobiography, *UNDER THE HOOD*, leading up to the time when he became the masked adventurer, Nite Owl. Reprinted with permission of the author.

I.

The lady who works in the grocery store at the corner of my block is called Denise, and she's one of America's great unpublished novelists. Over the years she's written *forty-two* romantic novels, none of which have ever reached the bookstores. I, however, have been fortunate enough to hear the plots of the last twenty-seven of these recounted in installments by the authoress herself every time I drop by the store for a jar of coffee or can of beans, and my respect for Denise's literary prowess knows no bounds. So, naturally enough, when I found myself faced with the daunting task of actually starting the book you now hold in your hands, it was Denise I turned to for advice.

"Listen," I said. "I don't know from writing a book. I have all this stuff in my head that I want to get down, but what do I write about first? Where do I begin?"

Without looking up from the boxes of detergent to which she was fixing price tags, Denise graciously delivered up a pearl of her accumulated wisdom in a voice of bored but benign condescension.

"Start off with the saddest thing you can think of and get the audience's sympathies on your side. After that, believe me, it's a walk."

Thank you, Denise. This book is dedicated to you, because I don't know how to choose between all the other people I should be dedicating it to.

The saddest thing I can think of is "The Ride of the Valkyries." Every time I hear it I get depressed and start wondering about the lot of humanity and the unfairness of life and all those other things that you think about at three in the morning when your digestion won't let you sleep. Now, I realize that nobody else on the planet has to brush away a tear when they hear that particular stirring refrain, but that's because they don't know about Moe Vernon.

When my father upped and left my Granddad's farm in Montana to bring his family to New York, Moe Vernon was the man he worked for. Vernon's Auto Repairs was just off Seventh Avenue, and although it was only 1928 when Dad started working there, there was just about enough trade for his wages to keep me and Mom and my sister Liantha in food and clothing. Dad was always really keen and enthusiastic about his work, and I used to think it was just because he had a thing about cars. Looking back, I can see it was more than that. It must have meant so much to him, just to have a job and be able to support his family. He'd had a lot of arguments with his father about coming east rather than taking over the farm, like the old man had planned for him, and most of the rows had ended with my grandfather predicting poverty and moral ruination for my dad and mom if they so much as set foot in New York. To be living the life that he himself had chosen and keeping his family above the poverty line in spite of his father's warnings must have meant more to my dad than anything in the world, but that's something I only understand now, with hindsight. Back then, I just thought he was crazy for crankshafts.

Anyway, I was twelve years old when we left Montana, so during those next few years in the big city I was just the age to appreciate the occasional trips to the auto shop with my dad, which is where I first set eyes on Moe Vernon, his employer.

Moe Vernon was a man around fifty-five or so, and he had one of those old New York faces that you don't see anymore. It's funny, but certain faces seem to go in and out of style. You look at old photographs and everybody has a certain look to them, almost as if they're related. Look at pictures from ten years later and you can see that there's a new kind of face starting to predominate, and that the old faces are fading away and vanishing, never to be seen again. Moe Vernon's face was like that: three chins, a wiseacre cynical curl to his lower lip, a certain hollowness around the eyes, hair retreating back across his head, attempting a rendezvous with the label on his shirt collar.



Vernon's Auto Repair c. 1928. (left to right) My father; myself, age 12; Moe Vernon; Fred Motz.

I'd go into the shop with my dad and Moe would be sitting there in his office, which had glass sides so he could watch the men working. Sometimes, if my father wanted to check something out with Moe before going ahead with his work, he'd send me over to the office to do it for him, which meant that I got to see the insides of Moe's inner sanctum. Or rather, I got to hear them.

You see, Moe was an opera buff. He had one of the new gramophones over in the corner of his office and all day he used to play scratchy old seventy-eight recordings of his favorites just as loud as he could manage. By today's standard, "as loud as he could manage" didn't amount to a whole lot of noise, but it sounded pretty cacophonous back in 1930, when things were generally quieter.

The other thing that was peculiar about Moe was his sense of humor, as represented by all the stuff he used to keep in the top right side drawer of his desk.

In that drawer, amongst a mess of rubber bands and paper clips and receipts and stuff, Moe had one of the largest collections of tasteless novelty items that I had seen up until that point or have seen at any time since. They were all risqué little toys and gadgets that Moe had picked up from gag shops or on visits to Coney Island, but it was the sheer range of them that was overwhelming: every cheap blue gimmick that you can remember your dad bringing home when he'd been out drinking with the boys and embarrassing your mom with; every ballpoint pen with a girl on the side whose swimsuit vanished when you turned it upside down; every salt and pepper crewet set shaped like a woman's breasts; every plastic dog mess. Moe had the works. Every time anybody went into his office he'd try to startle them by displaying his latest plaything. Actually, it used to shock my dad more than it did me. I don't think he liked the idea of his son being exposed to that kind of stuff, probably because of all the moral warnings my grandfather had impressed upon him. For my part, I wasn't offended and I even found it kind of funny. Not the things themselves . . . even by then I was too old to get much amusement out

of stuff like that. What I found funny was that for no apparent reason, a grown man should have a desk drawer full of such ludicrous devices.

Anyway, one day in 1933, a little after my seventeenth birthday, I was over at Vernon's Auto Repairs with Dad, helping him poke around in the oily innards of a busted-up Ford. Moe was in his office, and although we didn't find out till later, he was sitting wearing an artificial foam rubber set of realistically painted lady's bosoms, with which he hoped to get a few laughs from the guy who brought him the morning mail through from the front office when it arrived. While he waited, he was listening to Wagner.

The mail arrived in due course, and the guy handing it over managed to raise a dutiful chuckle at Moe's generous cleavage before leaving him to open and peruse the morning's missives. Amongst these (again, as we found out later) there was a letter from Moe's wife Beatrice, informing him that for the past two years she'd been sleeping with Fred Motz, the senior and most trusted mechanic employed at Vernon's Auto Repairs, who, unusually, hadn't shown up for work on that particular morning. This, according to the concluding paragraphs of the letter, was because Beatrice had taken all the money out of the joint account she shared with her husband and had departed with Fred for Tijuana.

The first anyone in the workshop knew about this was when the door of Moe's office slammed open and the startlingly loud and crackling rendition of "Ride of the Valkyries" blasted out from within. Framed in the doorway with tears in his eyes and the crumpled letter in his hand, Moe stood dramatically with all eyes turned towards him. He was still wearing the set of artificial breasts. Almost inaudible above the rising strains of Wagner swelling behind him, he spoke, with so much hurt and outrage and offended dignity fighting for possession of his voice that the end result was almost toneless.

"Fred Motz has had carnal knowledge of my wife Beatrice for the past two years."

He stood there in the wake of his announcement, the tears rolling down over his multiple chins to soak into the pink foam rubber of his bosom, making tiny sounds in his chest and throat that were trampled under the hooves of the Valkyries and lost forever.

And everybody started laughing.

I don't know what it was. We could see he was crying, but it was just something in the toneless way he'd said it, standing there wearing a pair of false breasts with all that crashing, triumphant music soaring all around him. None of us could help it, laughing at him like that. My dad and I were both doubled up and the other guys slaving over the nearby cars were wiping tears from their eyes and smearing their faces with oil in the process. Moe just looked at us all for a minute and then went back into his office and closed the door. A moment or two later the Wagner stopped with an ugly scraping noise as Moe snatched the needle from the groove of the gramophone record, and after that there was silence.

About half an hour passed before someone went in to apologize on behalf of everybody and to see if Moe was all right. Moe accepted the apology and said that he was fine. Apparently he was sitting there at his desk, breasts now discarded, getting on with normal routine paperwork as if nothing had happened.



I graduate from Police Academy (1938)

That night, he sent everybody home early. Then, running a tube from the exhaust of one of the shop's more operational vehicles in through the car's window, he started up the engine and drifted off into a final, bitter sleep amongst the carbon monoxide fumes. His brother took over the business and even eventually reemployed Fred Motz as chief mechanic.

And that's why "The Ride of the Valkyries" is the saddest thing I can think of, even though it's somebody else's tragedy rather than my own. I was there and I laughed along with all the rest and I guess that makes it part of my story too.

Now, if Denise's theory is correct, I should have your full sympathy and the rest will be a walk. So maybe it's safe to tell you about all the stuff you probably bought this book to read about. Maybe it's safe to tell you why I'm crazier than Moe Vernon ever was. I didn't have a drawer full of erotic novelties, but I guess I had my own individual quirks. And although I've never worn a set of false bosoms in my life, I've stood there dressed in something just as strange, with tears in my eyes while people died laughing.

II.

By 1939 I was twenty-three years old and had taken a job on the New York City police force. I've never really examined until now just why I should have chosen that particular career, but I guess it came as a result of a number of things. Foremost amongst these was probably my grandfather.

Even though I resented the old man for the amount of guilt and pressure and recrimination he'd subjected my dad to, I suppose that the simple fact of spending the first twelve years of my life living in my grandfather's proximity had indelibly stamped a certain set of moral values and conditions upon me. I was never so extreme in my beliefs concerning God, the family, and the flag as my father's father was, but if I look at myself today I can see basic notions of decency that were passed down direct from him to me. His name was Hollis Wordsworth Mason, and perhaps because my parents had flattered the old man by naming me after him, he always took a special concern over my upbringing and moral instruction. One of the things that he took great pains to impress upon me was that country folk were morally healthier than city folk and that cities were just cesspools into which all the world's dishonesty and greed and lust and godlessness drained and was left to fester unhindered. Obviously, as I got older and came to realize just how much drunkenness and domestic violence and child abuse was hidden behind the neighborly facade of some of these lonely Montana farmhouses, I understood that my grandfather's appraisal had been a little one-sided. Nevertheless, some of the things that I saw in the city during my first few years here filled me with a sort of ethical revulsion that I couldn't shake off. To some degree, I still can't.

The pimps, the pornographers, the protection artists. The landlords who set dogs on their elderly tenants when they wanted them out to make way for more lucrative custom. The old men who touched little children and the callous young rapists who were barely old enough to shave. I saw these people all around me and I'd feel sick in my gut at the world and what it was becoming. Worse, there were times when I'd upset my dad and mom by loudly wishing I was back in Montana. Despite everything, I wished no such thing, but sometimes I'd be mad at them and it seemed like the best way to hurt them, to reawaken all those old doubts and worries and sleeping dogs of guilt. I'm sorry I did it now, and I wish I could have told them that while they were alive. I wish I could have told them that they were right in bringing me to the city, that they did the right thing by me. I wish I could have let them know that. Their lives would have been so much easier.



Masked adventurers make the front page. (New York Gazette, October 14th, 1938) Note artist's impression of "The Hooded Vigilante."

When the gap between the world of the city and the world my grandfather had presented to me as right and good became too wide and depressing to tolerate, I'd turn to my other great love, which was pulp adventure fiction. Despite the fact that Hollis Mason Senior would have had nothing but scorn and loathing for all of those violent and garish magazines, there was a sort of prevailing morality in them that I'm sure he would have responded to. The world of Doc Savage and The Shadow was one of absolute values, where what was good was never in the slightest doubt and where what was evil inevitably suffered some fitting punishment. The notion of good and justice espoused by

Lamont Cranston with his slouch hat and blazing automatics seemed a long way from that of the fierce and taciturn old man I remembered sitting up alone into the Montana night with no company save his bible, but I can't help feeling that if the two had ever met they'd have found something to talk about. For my part, all those brilliant and resourceful sleuths and heroes offered a glimpse of a perfect world where morality worked the way it was *meant* to. Nobody in Doc Savage's world ever killed themselves except thwarted kamikaze assassins or enemy spies with cyanide capsules. Which world would you rather live in, if you had the choice?

Answering that question, I suppose, was what led me to become a cop. It was also what led me to later become something more than a cop. Bear that in mind and I think the rest of this narrative will be easier to swallow. I know people always have trouble understanding just what brings a person to behave the way that I and people like me behave, what makes us do the sort of things we do. I can't answer for anybody else, and I suspect that all our answers would be different anyway, but in my case it's fairly straightforward: I like the idea of adventure, and I feel bad unless I'm doing good. I've heard all the psychologists' theories, and I've heard all the jokes and the rumors and the innuendo, but what it comes down to for me is that I dressed up like an owl and fought crime because it was fun and because it needed doing and because I goddam felt like it.

Okay. There it is. I've said it. I dressed up. As an owl. And fought crime. Perhaps you begin to see why I half expect this summary of my career to raise more laughs than poor cuckolded Moe Vernon with his foam teats and his Wagner could ever hope to have done.

For me, it all started in 1938, the year when they invented the super-hero. I was too old for comic books when the first issue of ACTION COMICS came out, or at least too old to read them in public without souring my promotion chances, but I noticed a lot of the little kids on my beat reading it and couldn't resist asking one of them if I could glance through it. I figured if anybody saw me I could put it all down to keeping a good relationship with the youth of the community.

There was a lot of stuff in that first issue. There were detective yarns and stories about magicians whose names I can't remember, but from the moment I set eyes on it I only had eyes for the Superman story. Here was something that presented the basic morality of the pulps without all their darkness and ambiguity. The atmosphere of the horrific and faintly sinister

that hung around the Shadow was nowhere to be seen in the bright primary colors of Superman's world, and there was no hint of the repressed sex-urge which had sometimes been apparent in the pulps, to my discomfort and embarrassment. I'd never been entirely sure what Lamont Cranston was up to with Margo Lane, but I'd bet it was nowhere near as innocent and wholesome as Clark Kent's relationship with her namesake Lois. Of course, all of these old characters are gone and forgotten now, but I'm willing to bet that there are at least a few older readers out there who will remember enough to know what I'm talking about. Anyway, suffice it to say that I read that story through about eight times before giving it back to the complaining kid that I'd snatched it from.

It set off a lot of things I'd forgotten about, deep inside me, and kicked all those old fantasies that I'd had when I was thirteen or fourteen back into gear: The prettiest girl in the class would be attacked by bullies, and I'd be there to beat them off, but when she offered to kiss me as a reward, I'd refuse. Gangsters would kidnap my math teacher, Miss Albertine, and I'd track them down and kill them one by one until she was free, and then she'd break off her engagement with my sarcastic English teacher, Mr. Richardson, because she'd fallen hopelessly in love with her grim-faced and silent fourteen-year-old savior. All of this stuff came flooding back as I stood there gawking at the hijacked comic book, and even though I laughed at myself for having entertained such transparent juvenile fantasies, I didn't laugh as hard as I might have done. Not half as hard as I'd laughed at Moe Vernon, for example.

Anyway, although I'd occasionally manage to trick some unsuspecting tyke into lending me his most recent issue of the funnybook in question and then spend the rest of the day leaping tall buildings inside my head, my fantasies were to remain as fantasies until I opened a newspaper in the autumn of that same year and found that the super-heroes had escaped from their four-color world and invaded the plain, factual black and white of the headlines.

The first news story was simple and un presupposing enough, but it shared enough elements with those fictions that were closest to my heart to make me notice it and file it in my memory for future reference. It concerned an attempted assault and robbery that had taken place in Queens, New York. A man and his girlfriend, walking home after a night at the theater, had been set upon by a gang of three men armed with guns. After relieving the couple of their valuables, the gang has started to beat and physically abuse the young man while threatening to indecently assault his girlfriend. At this point, the crime had been interrupted by a figure "Who dropped into the alleyway from above with something over his face" and proceeded to disarm the three attackers before beating them with such severity that all three required hospital treatment and that one subsequently lost the use of both legs as a result of a spinal injury. The witnesses' recounting of the event was confused and contradictory, but there was still something in the story that gave me a tingle of recognition. And then, a week later, it happened again.

Reportage on this second instance was more detailed. A supermarket stick-up had been prevented thanks to the intervention of "A tall man, built like a wrestler, who wore a black hood and cape and also wore a noose around his neck." This extraordinary being had crashed in through the window of the supermarket while the robbery was in progress and attacked the man responsible with such intensity and savagery that those not disabled immediately were only too willing to drop their guns and surrender. Connecting this incidence of masked intervention with its predecessor, the papers ran the story under a headline that read simply "Hooded Justice." The first masked adventurer outside comic books had been given his name.

Reading and rereading that news item, I knew that I had to be the second. I'd found my vocation.

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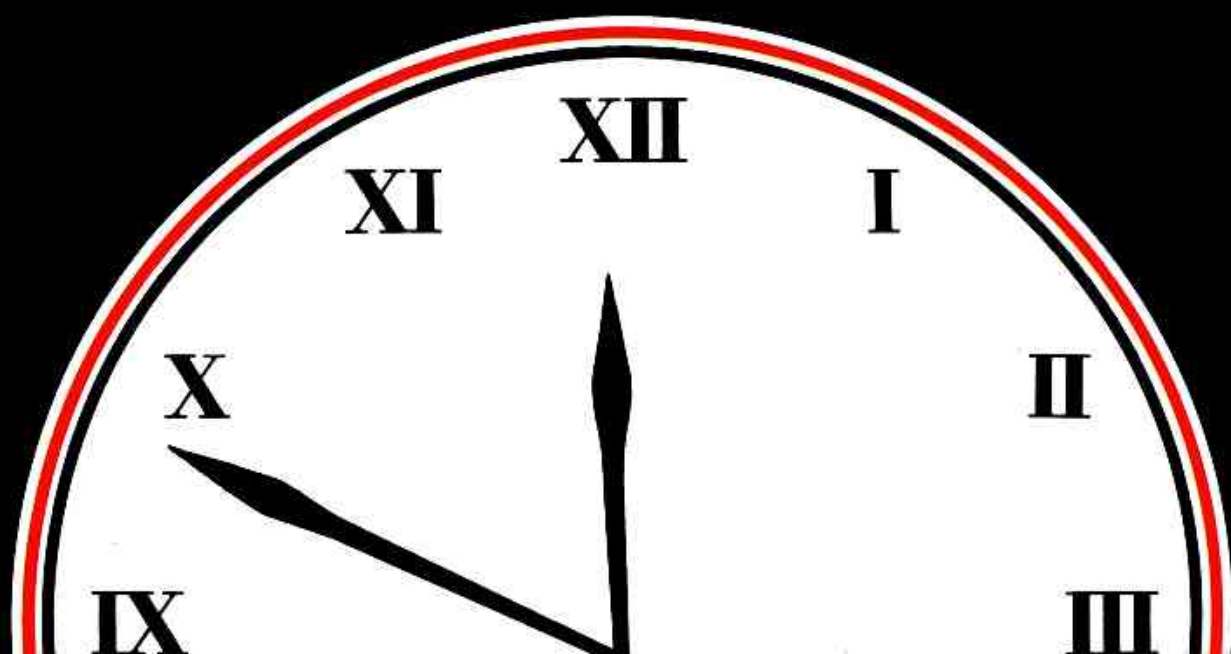
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